



Congresswoman Stephanie Murphy

H.R. 3609, Ensuring Linguistic Excellence and Vocational Aptitude by Teaching English (ELEVATE) Act
August 2017

Summary

- The *Ensuring Linguistic Excellence and Vocational Aptitude by Teaching English (ELEVATE) Act* would increase the amount of annual funding that Florida (and certain other states) receive under the U.S. Department of Education’s Title III English Language Acquisition grant program, by fixing a flaw in the allocation formula that does not adequately account for the number of school-aged children and youth from the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico that have relocated to Florida and other states.

Problem

- Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 provides federal grants to State Educational Agencies (SEAs), which in turn disseminate that funding to Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) in the state. The LEAs use these grants to hire qualified teachers and acquire other resources to help K-12 public school students who are trying to learn English—a population known as English Learners.
- The total Title III appropriation for Fiscal Year 2017 was \$737.4 million. Florida receives about \$40 to \$44 million a year in Title III grants. Florida’s allocation has remained stagnant over the last decade.
- There is a problem with the allocation formula that operates to Florida’s disadvantage. Each state’s allocation is based on two criteria: (1) the number of “English Learners” in the state as a percentage of the national total of English Learners (80% of funds are allocated pursuant to this formula), and (2) the number of “immigrant children and youth” in the state as a percentage of the national total of immigrant children and youth (20% of funds are allocated pursuant to this formula).
- The problem is with the second, smaller part of the formula. Applicable federal law defines “immigrant children and youth” to include children born outside of the 50 states, DC, and Puerto Rico—even though the primary language of instruction in Puerto Rico’s public schools is Spanish. Note that students who move to the states from the four other U.S. territories—the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands—*do* meet the definition of “immigrant children and youth,” even though the primary language of instruction in their public schools is English. This differential treatment between Puerto Rico and the other territories makes little sense from a public policy perspective.
- Therefore, because of the way the federal statute is written, Florida gets no credit under the second part of the formula for U.S. citizen students from Puerto Rico who have relocated to Florida with their families. This matters

because migration from Puerto Rico to the Florida in recent years has been huge. In 2000, there were 479,000 individuals of Puerto Rican birth or descent in Florida. As of 2015, there were 1.1 million, a 123 percent increase. That number is probably closer to 1.2 or 1.3 million today, the highest of any state.

- According to numerous press reports, the Orange County public school system is struggling to provide English-language instruction to the state's English Learner student population, because federal and state resources have not kept pace with the growing number of English Learners. This same problem is likely occurring in other LEAs within Florida that have received many families from Puerto Rico.

H.R. 3609, the ELEVATE Act

- The ELEVATE Act adjusts the second part of the allocation formula so that Florida will receive credit for its large and growing Puerto Rican population. The bill does so in a way that recognizes, and is sensitive to, the fact that families that relocate from Puerto Rico are American citizens.
- The bill itself would not increase total Title III funding, but would increase Florida's share of the Title III pie by some meaningful amount beyond the \$40 to \$44 million it currently receives. Rep. Murphy does support increasing both the total authorization and the total appropriation that Congress makes for Title III.
- It is important for children living in Florida and other U.S. jurisdictions to master English in addition to their native language, whether it is Spanish or another language. Being proficient in English—and being bilingual—opens many economic and social doors that would otherwise remain sealed shut.
- Original cosponsors: Reps. Stephanie Murphy, Darren Soto, Carlos Curbelo, Charlie Crist, Debbie Wasserman Schultz, Frederica Wilson, Alcee Hastings